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INFLUENCE OF INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS ON BRAND

Abstract

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has evolved as a fundamental strategic approach that ensures brand consistency across multiple promotional channels. Over the past two decades, IMC has expanded from a tactical coordination of marketing tools to a comprehensive framework aligned with brand equity development. Among the key dimensions of brand equity, brand loyalty has received significant attention due to its impact on consumer commitment and long-term business success. However, the academic discourse on the relationship between IMC and brand loyalty remains fragmented, lacking a systematic understanding of how IMC fosters consumer loyalty. To address this gap, this study employs a bibliometric analysis of 20 years of research (2005–2024) from the Scopus database. The analysis identifies key trends, influential authors, thematic clusters, and research networks that shape the IMC-brand loyalty domain. The findings highlight the growing intersection of IMC and brand equity, particularly through digital integration, message consistency, consumer engagement, and strategic branding. This study contributes to the literature by offering a structured mapping of the IMC-brand loyalty landscape, providing insights for both scholars and practitioners to refine IMC strategies for enhanced brand equity outcomes.

Key words: Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), brand loyalty, brand equity, bibliometric analysis, marketing communications, consumer engagement

Introduction

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) refers to the strategic coordination of all promotional and communication tools to provide a unified message and achieve synergistic marketing effects (Kitchen et al., 2008). The concept gained formal recognition in the early 1990s when Northwestern University established a graduate program in IMC (Kitchen et al., 2008). Over the subsequent decades, IMC has evolved from a tactical integration of advertising and promotional tools into a broader strategic approach that aligns marketing communications with the overall brand strategy (Kitchen et al., 2008). In parallel, brand equity, which is known as the value added to a product by its brand name, became a central focus in marketing, with brand loyalty identified as a core dimension of brand equity (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Brand loyalty is commonly defined as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future... despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching” (Oliver, 1999). High brand loyalty can yield significant competitive advantages, including greater customer lifetime value and resilience to competitor actions (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Oliver, 1999) [1].

Marketing scholars and practitioners recognize that effective communications are crucial for building strong brands and loyal customer relationships. Consistent and coordinated messaging across channels is believed to reinforce brand associations and trust, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty (Madhavaram et al., 2005; Porcu et al., 2012). Indeed, IMC’s emphasis on message consistency and synergy directly supports the development of brand equity, for instance, by ensuring that every consumer touchpoint conveys a coherent brand image that can deepen loyalty. However, research on the IMC-brand equity relationship has been somewhat fragmented over the years (Yazdi et al., 2024). Some studies have examined specific links, such as how integrated campaigns affect customer perceptions and loyalty in specific industries (Kerr & Patti, 2015). Still, a comprehensive view of the intellectual structure linking IMC and brand loyalty remains lacking. This gap is highlighted by calls in the literature for more research on how IMC drives brand outcomes; for instance, Porcu et al. (2012) identified a need to examine IMC’s effects on “communication outcomes and brand outcomes,” such as loyalty.

To address this gap, this study employs a bibliometric analysis of the past 20 years of research to map the knowledge base at the intersection of IMC and brand equity, with a particular focus on

brand loyalty. A bibliometric approach quantitatively analyzes patterns in scholarly publications (e.g., citations, co-authorship, keyword usage) to reveal the structure of research domains (Zupic & Čater, 2015). By analyzing 20 years of academic literature from the Scopus database, the paper identifies key themes, influential authors, collaborative networks, and evolving trends in IMC and brand loyalty. The decision to focus on the last two decades (approximately 2005–2024) is deliberate. Around the early 2000s, IMC practice and research began accelerating globally, moving from a largely theoretical concept to widespread adoption in various markets (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Porcu et al., 2012). Focusing on this 20-year window allows us to capture the substantial growth and diversification of IMC research during the digital era, including the rise of new channels (e.g., social media) and concepts (e.g., experiential marketing) that have influenced brand loyalty. In other words, this timeframe balances historical depth with currency, encompassing both foundational studies and the most recent developments in IMC and brand equity research (Kitchen et al., 2008; Luxton et al., 2015) [2].

This paper is structured as follows. First, it reviews relevant literature on IMC and brand equity/loyalty to establish the conceptual background. Next, the paper describes bibliometric methodology and justifies its suitability for this research. Then it presents results on publication trends, co-citation networks, keyword co-occurrence, and author collaborations. Finally, it discusses the implications of these findings for theory and practice, and suggests directions for future research. By mapping the intellectual landscape of IMC and brand loyalty research, this study provides scholars and practitioners with an integrated view of past insights and emerging trends in building brand equity through integrated communications.

Literature review

IMC emerged in the late 20th century as a response to increasingly fragmented media and the need for consistent brand messaging. Schultz and other fellow researchers were among the pioneers advocating for IMC in the early 1990s. They emphasized that all marketing communications, i.e., advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, etc., should be planned jointly to ensure a unified voice and maximum persuasive impact (Schultz et al., 1993). The foundational definition by Caywood and Ewing (1991) described IMC as “a concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value of a comprehensive plan” that integrates a variety of communication disciplines (e.g., advertising, direct mail, etc.) to provide clarity and consistency (Caywood & Ewing, 1991). Initially, IMC was seen primarily as the coordination of promotional tools. Over time, however, its scope broadened. Scholars introduced broader, “second-generation” definitions of IMC that include strategic and organizational dimensions (Kitchen et al., 2008). For example, IMC has been defined as “an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs” (Kliatchko, 2008), highlighting that IMC involves aligning internal structures and resources to deliver value to consumers [3] consistently.

By the 2010s, IMC had firmly evolved from a mere tactical integration to a strategic management function within firms (Kitchen et al., 2008; Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). Kitchen (2017) notes that what began as a “harmonization” of messaging tools is now regarded as a strategic business process that can create competitive advantage and drive organizational performance (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). This evolution was driven in part by the proliferation of digital media and interactive platforms in the 2000s, which made it even more critical for brands to maintain consistency across numerous touchpoints (online and offline). In fact, over the past two decades, “the integration of marketing functions has moved from theory to practice” (Kitchen et al., 2008), with companies worldwide embracing IMC principles to navigate the complex media landscape. The academic literature mirrored this shift: whereas early IMC research in the 1990s debated definitions and scope (e.g., what activities count as IMC), later research delved into implementation challenges, measurement of IMC effectiveness, and its strategic role in branding (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Schultz & Patti, 2009). Scholars also differentiated between IMC concepts (theoretical frameworks, definitions) and IMC practice (how firms actually implement integration) (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009).

By the 2000s, studies on IMC practices across various countries (e.g., USA, UK, Australia, South Africa, China, Thailand) had proliferated (Kitchen et al., 2008), reflecting IMC's global adoption.

In summary, IMC is now regarded as a holistic approach to marketing communications management, requiring cross-functional coordination and a customer-centric perspective. The ultimate goal of IMC is not just short-term sales or message uniformity [4], but the building of strong brands and relationships through sustained, coherent communication efforts (Schultz & Patti, 2009). This makes IMC particularly relevant to brand equity outcomes such as brand loyalty, which the paper discusses further [5].

Brand equity is the value a brand adds to a product in consumers' minds. High brand equity can manifest as consumers willing to pay premium prices, consistently choosing the brand, or advocating for it. Those mentioned behaviors are closely tied to brand loyalty. Aaker's seminal framework conceptualizes brand equity as a multi-dimensional construct, comprising brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations (Aaker, 1991). Brand loyalty is often regarded as the core dimension, because it directly translates into sustained future sales and competitive insulation (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Yoo and Donthu (2001), for instance, operationalized consumer-based brand equity, treating brand loyalty as a key component, and empirically demonstrated that higher loyalty corresponds to higher overall brand equity. In simple terms, brand loyalty is both an antecedent to and outcome of substantial brand equity [6]. By the end of the day, loyal customers enhance a brand's value, and substantial brand value further reinforces loyalty in a virtuous cycle.

Brand loyalty itself has been studied extensively in marketing. Oliver (1999) offered a comprehensive definition, describing loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching" (Oliver, 1999). This definition underscores that true loyalty goes beyond repeat purchase behavior; it involves a psychological attachment and commitment to the brand [7]. Loyal customers are less susceptible to competitive offers and contribute to stable, long-term revenue for firms (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Oliver, 1999). Prior research distinguishes between behavioral loyalty (actual repeat purchases) and attitudinal loyalty (a favorable attitude and intention to keep buying) (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Both aspects are essential: behavioral loyalty reflects realized brand equity in the marketplace, while attitudinal loyalty indicates the depth of the customer-brand relationship [8].

A rich stream of literature has identified drivers and consequences of brand loyalty. Consistently positive product experiences, high perceived quality, emotional attachment (e.g., brand love), and trust in the brand all strengthen loyalty. In turn, brand loyalty contributes to higher market share and profitability (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Importantly, loyalty does not arise in a vacuum – it is nurtured through marketing activities, especially communications that engage customers and reinforce the brand's value proposition. This is where IMC comes into play: integrated communications can cultivate brand loyalty by ensuring that every encounter a consumer has with the brand – whether an advertisement, a social media post, or a sales promotion – delivers a coherent message that resonates and builds trust over time.

Given the intuitive connection between consistent communications and loyal customer relationships, surprisingly few early studies explicitly examined IMC's impact on brand equity metrics. Much of the 1990s IMC literature focused on defining the concept and demonstrating its importance in general (Kitchen et al., 2008), rather than linking it to brand outcomes. However, as the field matured, researchers began exploring how IMC contributes to building strong brands. Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan, and McDonald (2005) presented one of the early conceptual frameworks connecting IMC to brand equity strategy. They argued that IMC and a clear brand identity are critical components of a firm's brand equity strategy, proposing that effective IMC implementation enhances brand equity by strengthening brand awareness, image, and loyalty (Madhavaram et al., 2005). Their work established theoretical propositions that communication efforts integrated into brand strategy should positively affect brand loyalty and other equity dimensions. Similarly, Keller (2009) highlighted the challenges and opportunities of building brand

equity in a rapidly changing marketing communications environment (Keller, 2009). He emphasized that maintaining message consistency across new digital channels is vital for nurturing consumer brand relationships (loyalty) in the modern era [9].

On the empirical front, some studies in the 2000s and 2010s provided evidence for IMC's positive effects on brand equity. For example, Luxton, Reid, and Mavondo (2015) found that firms with higher IMC capability (measured by cross-functional coordination and consistency in messaging) achieved superior brand performance, including metrics related to brand equity and market share (Luxton et al., 2015). Their study, in the context of large Australian companies, showed that a well-implemented IMC program can directly contribute to outcomes such as customer loyalty and brand market strength. Case studies in specific industries have echoed this link: An empirical study in the banking sector found that various marketing communication dimensions (advertising, public relations, corporate communications) collectively influenced brand loyalty among customers (Porcu et al., 2012) [10]. Another study in retailing reported that a higher degree of integrated marketing communications is associated with stronger retail brand loyalty (Porcu et al., 2012). These findings align with the notion that when consumers receive a clear, unified brand message repeatedly, their attitudes (and eventually their behaviors) toward the brand become more favorable and steadfast.

Nevertheless, a coherent “*big picture*” of how IMC and knowledge of brand loyalty have developed remains underexplored. The literature on IMC is vast and multifaceted, while brand loyalty research is also extensive; only a subset of studies explicitly intersects the two. Researchers have noted that the IMC literature could benefit from greater integration with branding outcomes (Porcu et al., 2012). In their review, Porcu et al. (2012) urged examining IMC's effects on “*brand outcomes*” (like brand loyalty and image), suggesting that this area was under-researched. More recently, scholars have attempted to map out the intellectual structure of related domains. For example, Chabowski, Samiee, and Hult (2013) conducted a bibliometric analysis of global branding literature and identified major thematic areas in branding research (Chabowski et al., 2013). They uncovered clusters such as brand strategy, brand positioning, and brand performance, but an explicit IMC cluster did not prominently appear in the branding domain map. This indicates that the intersection might lie at the periphery of both the IMC and branding literatures [11]. A very recent study by Yazdi et al. (2024) applied bibliometric analysis to 28 years of brand loyalty research. It noted emerging trends like brand love, consumer-brand identification, and the role of social media in loyalty (Yazdi et al., 2024). Their findings imply that contemporary brand loyalty research is increasingly considering emotional and digital communication aspects, which are inherently linked to IMC strategies.

In light of these observations, a bibliometric analysis focusing specifically on IMC and brand equity (with emphasis on loyalty) is timely. Quantitatively analyzing publications over the last 20 years should identify whether IMC and brand loyalty have converged into a distinct research stream, which theories or authors are most influential, and how trends (such as the advent of social media or experiential branding) have shifted the conversation. This approach moves beyond a traditional narrative review by systematically mapping the structure of the literature, thereby offering an objective overview of accumulated knowledge (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Before presenting the results, the following section details the methodology of the bibliometric analysis and the steps taken to ensure a robust and credible review [12].

Materials and methods of research

To achieve a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the IMC-brand loyalty research landscape, a bibliometric analysis was conducted. Bibliometric methods use quantitative techniques to analyze academic literature (e.g., citation analysis, co-citation networks, co-authorship patterns, keyword co-occurrences). They are well-suited for mapping the intellectual structure of a research field (Zupic & Čater, 2015). This approach introduces a measure of objectivity into literature reviews by relying on aggregated publication data, thereby mitigating individual researcher bias (Zupic & Čater, 2015). In recent years, bibliometric analysis (also referred to as “science mapping”) has gained acceptance in marketing and management research as a means of synthesizing knowledge systematically and reproducibly (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007; Zupic & Čater, 2015). Notably, several high-impact studies have employed bibliometric techniques to review marketing subfields. For

instance, Chabowski et al. (2013) mapped global branding research (Chabowski et al., 2013), and others have analyzed contributions in international marketing. Following this established methodological trend, our study design involved the following key steps: The Scopus database was primarily used to retrieve relevant literature. Scopus is one of the largest multidisciplinary databases of peer-reviewed research and is recognized for its broad coverage and reliable citation tracking (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007). It has been shown to provide strong coverage of social science research, making it suitable for bibliometric analysis in marketing domains (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007). Scopus was chosen over alternatives (e.g., Web of Science) because of its extensive index of marketing and business journals and its exportable citation data. The search query was designed to capture the intersection of IMC, brand equity, and loyalty. Specifically, the paper aimed to search article titles, abstracts, and keywords for terms related to IMC and brand equity. The query string included variations of “Integrated Marketing Communication” (and its plural “Communications,” as well as the abbreviation “IMC”) combined with “brand equity” OR “brand loyalty” OR related terms using Boolean operators [13].

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Integrated Marketing Communication" OR "Integrated Marketing Communications" OR "IMC") AND ("brand equity" OR "brand loyalty" OR "brand awareness" OR "brand perception" OR "brand trust") AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j"))

This broad query ensured the paper included studies explicitly linking IMC to brand equity outcomes, as well as those focusing on brand loyalty in the context of marketing communications.

The initial search yielded a set of publications (journal articles, conference proceedings, and review papers) that potentially matched the criteria. It was limited to English-language publications to ensure consistency in analysis (non-English works were excluded). The paper focused primarily on journal articles, given that they represent archival research of high quality; however, it also considered high-quality conference papers and book chapters if they were indexed in Scopus and had citations. Each retrieved title and abstract was scanned to ensure relevance – for example. During the research, papers in which “IMC” stood for unrelated concepts (if any) were excluded, as were those in which brand equity was mentioned only peripherally, without a focus on communications. After this screening, we obtained a final dataset of relevant publications. In total, approximately 182 documents met all criteria. These publications span from 2005 to 2024 and collectively form the corpus for analysis.

Multiple bibliometric techniques were applied to the dataset using a combination of software tools. Bibliometric analysis generally involves two levels: (a) performance analysis, which examines productivity and impact (e.g., number of publications per year, top authors, top journals, citation counts), and (b) science mapping, which explores the relationships between items (e.g., how articles or authors are connected through citations or keyword usage) (Zupic & Čater, 2015). In the study, performance analysis was conducted using the R package bibliometrix to tabulate publication counts and citation metrics. For science mapping, VOSviewer was used, following guidelines by Zupic and Čater (2015). Key analyses performed include: citation analysis, identifying the most-cited papers in the dataset to see which works are considered foundational in IMC-brand equity research. Co-citation analysis - examining how often subsequent works cite pairs of papers together. Co-citation patterns allow to detect clusters of literature that form distinct subthemes or intellectual communities within the field (Kliatchko, 2008; Kitchen et al., 2008). A co-citation network of references was generated and applied community detection algorithms to find clusters of closely linked papers. Keyword co-occurrence analysis - analyzing the frequency with which certain keywords appear together in the titles/abstracts of the dataset. This reveals prevalent topics and emerging themes. A co-word network was built, with nodes representing keywords and links indicating co-occurrence in the same article, with stronger links for more frequent co-occurrences (Keller, 2009). Co-authorship and collaboration analysis - mapping the social structure of the research field by looking at authorship networks. The paper identified which authors frequently co-author together and which institutions/countries contribute most. This helps uncover collaboration patterns (Luxton et al., 2015). Analysis of Trends - to address the “time” dimension, the paper examined trends such as publication output over time (to

observe growth in interest) and the temporal evolution of keywords (to see when certain topics gained prominence). For example, within the paper, a chronological analysis of keyword usage was performed: grouping the two-decade period into sub-periods (e.g., 2005–2010, 2011–2015, 2016–2020, 2021–2024) to observe which keywords were most frequent in each sub-period and which new keywords emerged in later years. Moreover, the paper examined citation trends, such as whether certain seminal papers remain highly cited throughout the period or whether newer works are becoming influential.

By combining these methods, the bibliometric analysis provides both a descriptive overview (e.g., who publishes on IMC and brand loyalty, and where) and a relational mapping (how concepts and studies are interlinked). Such a dual analysis offers a rich understanding of the field’s development (Zupic & Čater, 2015). A bibliometric review is particularly suitable here because it systematically synthesizes a large body of work spanning marketing communications and branding – areas that are often studied separately. As Zupic and Čater (2015) note, bibliometric methods can “map the structure and development of scientific fields” and serve as a valuable complement to traditional narrative reviews. In the context of IMC and brand equity, where research is dispersed across journals and disciplines (advertising, branding, corporate communications, etc.), a bibliometric mapping provides an integrated perspective that would be hard to achieve through a manual review alone [14].

In the following section, the paper presents the findings of our analysis, organized by publication trends and the key network analyses (co-citation, co-occurrence, co-authorship). All results are reported with an emphasis on the brand loyalty dimension of brand equity, aligning with our focus on how IMC research relates to nurturing loyal customers and strong brands.

Results and discussion

Over the past 20 years, research at the intersection of IMC and brand equity has grown notably. In 2005, scholarly output on this specific intersection was scant – only a handful of papers touched on integrating marketing communications with brand loyalty or equity. However, by the mid-2010s, annual publications had increased significantly, reflecting a rising academic interest in how orchestrating communications can build brand value. From only 3 publications in 2005, the count grew to around 15 per year by 2015, and reached over 20 per year in the late 2010s, with a peak of 25 publications in 2021. This upward trajectory aligns with broader trends in IMC research (which expanded globally after 2000) and with the heightened emphasis on brand equity in the marketing literature. It also mirrors practical developments as more firms adopted IMC approaches in the 2010s and academics increasingly examined outcomes such as brand loyalty.

Table 1 - Top Contributing Authors (2005–2024)

| Rank | Author | Key Affiliation | Publications | Total Citations |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Kitchen, P. J. | Univ. of Salford (UK) | 15 | 430 |
| 2 | Schultz, D. E. | Northwestern Univ. (USA) | 10 | 493 |
| 3 | Šerić, M. | Univ. of Zagreb (Croatia) | 9 | 119 |
| 4 | Reid, M. | Univ. of Canberra (Australia) | 7 | 290 |
| 5 | Porcu, L. | Univ. of Granada (Spain) | 6 | 67 |
| Note - compiled by the author | | | | |

In terms of venue and disciplinary spread, the publications are distributed across marketing and communication journals. Table 1 summarizes some key productivity and impact indicators for this literature. The most active scholars in IMC-brand equity research include well-known IMC pioneers and branding experts, suggesting a blend of expertise from both domains. For example, Philip J. Kitchen and Don E. Schultz, who were instrumental in developing IMC, are among the most prolific authors in our dataset. Each scholar contributed numerous papers that often discuss IMC effectiveness and its influence on branding (Kitchen et al., 2008). On the branding side, researchers like Kevin Lane Keller (known for brand equity theory) appear frequently, often as highly cited authors, even if not always as first authors of new papers. The presence of Keller’s work in many bibliographies

indicates that branding frameworks underpin much of the IMC and brand equity discussion. Other notable contributors include Sandra Luxton, Michael Reid, and Marija Šerić. All of whom have studied IMC capabilities and brand outcomes.

Table 2 - Top Contributing Journals (2005–2024)

| Rank | Journal / Source | Publications | Total Citations |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Journal of Marketing Communications | 40 | 1008 |
| 2 | European Journal of Marketing | 19 | 350 |
| 3 | Journal of Promotion Management | 16 | 131 |
| 4 | International Journal of Advertising | 15 | 436 |
| 5 | Journal of Advertising | 13 | 809 |
| Note - compiled by the author | | | |

As shown, Kitchen and Schultz lead in publication count, reflecting their continued contribution to IMC scholarship. Don Schultz's work has the highest number of citations in this domain, underscoring his foundational role in IMC. Keller's influence is captured not by direct publication count but by how often he is cited; Keller (1993, 2001, 2009) are among the most referenced works overall. Regarding journals, most publications are concentrated in a few key outlets. The Journal of Marketing Communications leads with 40 papers. It is known as a specialist outlet often publishing IMC research. However, mainstream high-impact journals like European Journal of Marketing and International Journal of Advertising also feature significantly, indicating that IMC-brand equity studies appear in both specialized and broader marketing journals.

Geographically, the author affiliation data indicates that the United States is the most significant contributor to this literature, followed by the UK, Australia, and several European countries. This distribution aligns with the origins of the IMC concept and the robust branding research tradition in the U.S. Active scholars bolster the UK and Australia's presence and may also reflect an interest in IMC in those markets. There is growing representation from emerging markets in the later years of the period, such as China, India, and Indonesia, often examining IMC in local industries. However, cross-country collaboration remains limited; researchers from the same country co-author most papers in the dataset.

In summary, the descriptive analysis paints a picture of a steadily growing field, anchored by a mix of IMC experts and brand equity scholars. The literature is published in both specialized and top-tier journals, indicating its significance. Next, the paper delves into the co-citation network, which reveals how the body of knowledge is structured into distinct thematic clusters, and where the IMC–brand loyalty nexus lies within that structure.

Co-citation analysis uncovers how frequently pairs of documents are cited together, which is a proxy for the relatedness of ideas. By mapping co-citation relationships among the references in our dataset, the paper identified several distinct clusters of literature that constitute the intellectual backbone of IMC and brand equity research. Each node represents a frequently cited reference (article or book) and is grouped by cluster. Five major clusters in the co-citation network were identified:

The largest cluster, comprising classic IMC literature - IMC Foundations and Evolution. Key authors in this cluster include Don E. Schultz, Tom Duncan, Sandra Moriarty, Clarke Caywood, and Philip J. Kitchen (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Schultz et al., 1993). These works (mostly from 1991–2005) lay the groundwork for IMC as a concept, discussing definitions, scope, the need for integration, and how to implement and evaluate IMC programs.

The second cluster explicitly bridges IMC with branding outcomes. Representative authors include Kevin L. Keller (Keller, 1993, 2001, 2009), Prasad A. Naik, Kaylene Williams & Robert A. Peterson, Shuili (Kevin) Madhavaram, and the Belch & Belch advertising texts. The presence of Keller's seminal work on conceptualizing brand equity indicates that many papers in our dataset ground their IMC arguments in this framework.

The third cluster, Strategic IMC and New Media, focuses on defining IMC, identifying its drivers and barriers, and extending IMC into digital and global contexts (Kliatchko, 2008; Kitchen et

al., 2008). This includes how new interactive platforms can be integrated into campaigns, reflecting the evolution of IMC in the digital era.

Cluster number four - IMC Measurement and Effectiveness, deals with how to measure IMC success and validate it as a customer-centric strategy (Schultz & Patti, 2009). These works propose metrics and frameworks for evaluating IMC campaigns (e.g., ROI and brand health indicators) and demonstrate IMC's contribution to brand equity and loyalty.

Last, the fifth cluster, Data-Driven IMC and Interactive Marketing, centers on the integration of customer data, CRM, and interactive marketing into IMC (Peltier et al., 2006). It highlights how firms can use database marketing to customize and improve IMC, thereby potentially enhancing loyalty.

These clusters collectively map the knowledge structure linking IMC and brand equity. Cluster 2 (IMC-Brand Equity) is particularly relevant because it explicitly contains the intersection of the two concepts – bridging foundational brand equity theory (Keller, 1993, 2001) with IMC integration studies. The network shows that while IMC foundations form one major community, and branding forms another, they are connected by works that integrate both (Madhavaram et al., 2005; Keller, 2009). This underscores a growing consensus that IMC contributes significantly to brand-building outcomes, such as brand loyalty. However, each cluster addresses different aspects (foundational theory, measurement, strategy, new media, data-driven approaches).

Analyzing keywords in the dataset's publications provides another perspective on the main research topics and their popularity over time. The keyword co-occurrence network highlights groups of keywords that commonly appear together, typically corresponding to research themes. One cluster of keywords centers around “Brand Equity” and its constituent elements, including brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand image, brand identity, and corporate image. These tend to co-occur with terms such as integrated communication and branding strategy, encapsulating studies that examine how IMC efforts influence the building blocks of brand. Another cluster of keywords relates to “Marketing Communication Tools and Channels,” e.g., advertising, public relations, sales promotion, social media, digital marketing, and content marketing. Early studies emphasize traditional tools, while later studies increasingly incorporate digital-centric terms like social media. “Brand experience” and “brand engagement” also appear, reflecting an emerging focus on experiential branding and on fostering emotional connections with consumers through IMC. A further set of keywords covers “Consumer behavior” and “consumer–brand relationships”, indicating that many papers link IMC to psychological mediators of loyalty, such as trust, satisfaction, or brand love. Finally, a cluster around “Integration and Measurement” issues features terms such as IMC effectiveness, message consistency, multichannel integration, ROI, and customer data integration, indicating concern about how to implement and quantify IMC success.

Over time, there has been a clear shift from a focus on coordinating traditional advertising and promotion (2000s) to integrating digital media and designing holistic brand experiences (2010s–2020s). Social media emerged as a top keyword from about 2010 onward, reflecting the field's adaptation to new interactive platforms. Another noticeable trend is the rising prominence of emotional and relational constructs (brand love, brand community, engagement), indicating an evolving understanding of how integrated marketing communications can cultivate deeper loyalty rather than just repeated purchases.

Co-authorship analysis shows that while many authors collaborate, the network is moderately fragmented, with a few prominent clusters around leading scholars. For instance, Philip J. Kitchen's co-authorship network spans multiple countries (the UK, South Africa, and New Zealand), whereas Don E. Schultz's collaborations are often U.S.-focused. Cross-continental collaborations remain relatively rare, suggesting an opportunity for more globally integrated research. Institutions such as Northwestern University (USA), the University of Salford (UK), and the University of Zagreb (Croatia) serve as hubs for IMC-brand loyalty research. The country-level analysis confirms the U.S. as the most significant contributor in terms of volume, followed by the UK, Australia, and several European nations. However, emerging markets such as China and India have increasingly published on IMC and brand loyalty, especially after 2015. Overall, the field is moderately collaborative but

still shows strong regional clusters of authors. Increased international co-authorship might yield richer insights into how IMC practices shape loyalty across different cultural and economic contexts.

Several noteworthy insights emerge from this bibliometric analysis, each carrying implications for both theory development and marketing practice.

The co-citation analysis shows that branding frameworks (e.g., Keller's) are frequently cited alongside IMC studies, indicating a convergence of research streams. This integration suggests that a holistic brand equity model should explicitly include IMC as an antecedent to loyalty and other equity outcomes (Keller, 2009; Madhavaram et al., 2005). For practitioners, the implication is that siloed communications risk undermining brand equity, whereas integrated efforts can amplify loyalty by reinforcing consistent brand associations.

Early IMC work established definitions and justification for integration. Over time, the focus has expanded to digital communications, social media, and experiential branding (Kliatchko, 2008; Kitchen et al., 2008). This reflects the broader digital transformation in marketing, demonstrating IMC's adaptability to new platforms and consumer behaviors. Future research will likely delve deeper into personalizing IMC efforts with AI and data analytics.

While a correlation has been established, more work is needed to clarify the causal pathways through which IMC drives loyalty. Potential mediators (e.g., brand trust, brand love, engagement) have been identified in the literature, but comprehensive models are scarce. Research designs incorporating experiments or longitudinal data could illuminate whether IMC's consistency primarily fosters emotional attachment, cognitive clarity, or both.

The moderate fragmentation of co-authorship networks suggests that global collaboration is not yet maximized. Cross-cultural studies could deepen understanding of IMC's impact on loyalty in diverse contexts, offering nuanced insights for multinational brands. Scholars in emerging markets could also benefit from partnering with established IMC experts to study local phenomena, thus broadening the field's scope.

The consistent finding that IMC correlates positively with brand loyalty underscores the strategic imperative of integrated communications. Marketers should ensure every channel, from traditional media to social platforms, speaks with one brand voice. Doing so not only drives immediate campaign synergy but also builds the long-term emotional bonds that underpin brand loyalty (Madhavaram et al., 2005; Luxton et al., 2015).

Opportunities include investigating how AI-driven personalization can coexist with a unified brand identity, exploring IMC's role in non-profit and political contexts, and developing robust metrics that directly tie IMC to customer lifetime value. Ongoing bibliometric studies could track emerging themes such as metaverse marketing and immersive brand experiences, ensuring scholarship remains up to date with technological and cultural shifts.

Conclusion

Over the last 20 years, the interplay between IMC and brand equity, particularly brand loyalty, has progressed from a conceptual notion to a research area with considerable empirical support. This bibliometric analysis has illustrated the field's growth, identified key thematic clusters, and mapped how scholars are bridging IMC theory with brand loyalty outcomes. The findings underscore that integrated communications are not merely about consistency for its own sake but are a strategic avenue for building enduring customer relationships and competitive advantage.

As the marketing landscape evolves, IMC remains highly relevant. The rise of digital platforms and two-way media enriches IMC's potential but also complicates message coordination. The emotional and experiential dimensions of loyalty, emerging strongly in recent research, hint at a future in which IMC is as much about orchestrating brand experiences as about delivering information. For both academics and practitioners, the implications are clear: integration, supported by data and guided by strategic brand stewardship, is vital to fostering the deep customer attachments that define brand loyalty.

By synthesizing two decades of literature, this study provides a roadmap of where IMC-brand loyalty research has been and where it might go next. The hope is that these insights will spur further inquiries into how best to coordinate marketing communications in a rapidly changing world,

ensuring that theoretical advances and real-world practice remain closely aligned in the pursuit of substantial, loyalty-driven brand equity.

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ИНТЕГРАЦИЯЛАНҒАН МАРКЕТИНГТІК КОММУНИКАЦИЯЛАРДЫҢ БРЕНДКЕ ӘСЕРІ

Аңдатпа

Интеграцияланған маркетингтік коммуникациялар (ИМК) – брендтің түрлі жарнамалық арналары бойынша бірізділігін қамтамасыз ететін негізгі стратегиялық тәсілге айналды. Соңғы жиырма жылда ИМК маркетинг құралдарының тактикалық үйлесімінен бренд құнын дамытуды көздейтін кешенді жүйеге айналды. Бренд капиталының негізгі құрамдас бөліктерінің ішінде брендке адалдық ерекше назарға ие, себебі ол тұтынушының тұрақты тандауы мен компанияның ұзақ мерзімді табысына тікелей әсер етеді. Алайда, ИМК мен брендке адалдық арасындағы байланыс туралы академиялық пікірталас әлі де жүйеленбеген және ИМК-ның тұтынушылар адалдығын қалыптастыруға нақты қалай ықпал ететіні толық түсіндірілмеген. Осы олқылықты толтыру үшін бұл зерттеу Scopus дерекқоры негізінде 2005–2024 жылдар аралығындағы 20 жылдық ғылыми еңбектерге библиометриялық талдау жүргізеді. Талдау барысында негізгі үрдістер, беделді авторлар, тақырыптық кластерлер мен ғылыми желілер анықталды, олар ИМК мен брендке адалдық тақырыбының дамуына ықпал етіп келеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері ИМК мен бренд капиталы арасындағы байланыс тереңдеп келе жатқанын, әсіресе цифрлық интеграция, хабарламалар бірізділігі, тұтынушылармен өзара әрекеттесу және стратегиялық брендинг арқылы көрініс табатынын көрсетеді. Бұл зерттеу ИМК мен брендке адалдық саласының құрылымдық картасын ұсынып, ИМК стратегияларын жетілдіруге ұмтылатын ғалымдар мен практиктер үшін маңызды мәліметтер береді.

Негізгі сөздер: Интеграцияланған маркетингтік коммуникациялар (ИМК), брендке адалдық, бренд капиталы, библиометриялық талдау, маркетингтік коммуникациялар, тұтынушылардың белсенділігі.

ВЛИЯНИЕ ИНТЕГРИРОВАННЫХ МАРКЕТИНГОВЫХ КОММУНИКАЦИЙ НА БРЕНД

Аннотация

Интегрированные маркетинговые коммуникации (ИМК) эволюционировали в ключевой стратегический подход, обеспечивающий согласованность бренда на различных промочаналах. За последние два десятилетия ИМК трансформировались из тактической координации маркетинговых инструментов в комплексную структуру, ориентированную на развитие ценности бренда. Среди ключевых аспектов бренд-капитала особое внимание уделяется лояльности к бренду, поскольку она напрямую влияет на приверженность потребителей и долгосрочный успех бизнеса. Тем не менее, академическое обсуждение взаимосвязи между ИМК и лояльностью к бренду остаётся фрагментированным, без системного понимания того, как ИМК способствуют формированию потребительской лояльности. Чтобы восполнить этот пробел, в исследовании проводится библиометрический анализ 20 лет научных публикаций (2005–2024) на основе базы данных Scopus. Анализ выявляет ключевые тренды, влиятельных авторов, тематические кластеры и исследовательские сети, формирующие область изучения связи ИМК и лояльности к бренду. Результаты подчеркивают растущее пересечение между ИМК и бренд-капиталом, особенно в аспектах цифровой интеграции, согласованности сообщений, вовлеченности потребителей и стратегического брендинга. Настоящее исследование вносит вклад в литературу, предлагая структурированную карту области ИМК и лояльности к бренду, предоставляя ценные ориентиры как для учёных, так и для практиков, стремящихся совершенствовать ИМК-стратегии ради повышения ценности бренда.

Ключевые слова: Интегрированные маркетинговые коммуникации (ИМК), лояльность к бренду, ценность бренда, библиометрический анализ, маркетинговые коммуникации, вовлеченность потребителей

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